American Soldier Discovers Wagner's Piano

AN American soldier has found Richard Wagner's piano, and it is coming to America. For forty-eight years it has been standing in the little drawing room of an old music teacher in Berlin. It is the same piano on which Wagner wrote the "Ring" music, bought for him by the boy King Ludwig of Bavaria when he rescued Wagner from his difficulties and set him by his royal patronage on the high road to fame. It witnessed every detail of that great romance of love and music between Wagner and Cosima, the daughter of Liszt and the wife of Von Bulow, Wagner's brilliant conductor. It marked the turning point in Wagner's life When he first touched the keys he was the "mad composer"; when ten years later he exchanged it for another instrument Bayreuth had been created and Wagner was one of the great ones of the world.

The home of Wagner at Triebschen, where his piano was silent witness to the coming of Cosima to comfort the morose composer.

If the old piano, which like many another art treasure of Europe is finding its way to America as the painting of "The Blue Boy" did a few months ago, could talk it would tell many stories. The history of the writing of "The Niebelungen Ring" lies in its now yellowed keyboard. To it and from it, from the days of the villa on Lake Starnberg to the time when the heights of Bayreuth were reached, came and went Cosima, the "eternal woman," inspiring the "master."

Storm raged through musical and political Europe during the years of this piano under Wagner's fingers. The King almost withdrew his royal patronage. Liszt bitterly implored his daughter and condemned Wagner, Von Bulow, Cosima's husband, crying out, "I cannot kill the 'master!' If he were any one else he would have been dead long ago." Wagner and Cosima loved, love triumphed, art triumphed, the music drama emerged in perfect completeness. All this the piano saw and of it was a part.

Fifty-eight years ago, on May 20, 1864, the King of Bavaria gave the piano to Wagner. It was the first of his gifts to the "master," delivered within sixteen days after Wagner, disheartened, hounded by creditors, his dreams practically abandoned, had been "found" and brought to Munich, there to write the music of the future that Ludwig was sure he could accomplish. The piano's record is an epitome of musical history. It remained Wagner's constant companion in the villa at Lake Starnberg, later in a villa at Munich, in Triebschen (where Wagner spent many years with Cosima, finally marrying her there) and through the first few years of preparation at Bayreuth.

On it in 1864 he composed the "Huldignungs March," dedicated to King Ludwig. He put the finishing touches to "Tristan und Isolde" on it. On it he sketched "Parsifal" for the first time in 1865. On it at Triebschen in 1866 and 1867 he started and completed "Die Meistersinger." In 1869 on it he finished "Siegfried." On it in 1869 and 1870 he started "Gotterdammerung," completing it in 1872. He scored "Siegfried" in 1871, "Gotterdammerung" in 1876. On this piano he composed the famous "Kaiser March" in 1871. "Das Rheingold," the "Ring" prelude, was produced in 1869; "Die Walkure" was done in 1870 and "The Ring" in its entirety and complete in the Opera House at Bayreuth, the piano's work now being done, in 1876.

Richard Wagner and his famous piano, on which he composed "Parsifal," Gotterdammerung," "Das Rheingold" and others of his masterpieces.

The soldier who found the old piano was Richard Prosser of 82 Washington place, New York. Theobold Guenther, in whose house Prosser found the piano, had taught in the family of Bechstein, the piano manufacturer. In 1874, when Bechstein secured possession of the piano from Wagner, he offered it to the teacher of his children. The music teacher grasped the opportunity, and from that day until now the piano has stood in his own salon.

By what arguments the young American managed to persuade the music teacher to part with his possession has not been divulged.

He made, of course, the most careful research, and holds documents establishing the piano's authenticity, sworn to by the present head of the house of Bechstein, certified by the president of the High Court of Berlin and the German Foreign Office and authenticated by the Spanish Embassy, the latter acting for the Minister of the United States.

The piano is to arrive in this country in June. And not the least interesting thing in conjunction with this is that some time this fall or winter the piano will be followed by the arrival of Mme. Cosima Wagner and Siegfried Wagner. Mme. Cosima might be called the "heroine" of the piano, for hers was the romance that it witnessed and it was part of the love between her and the composer.

First on Lake Starnberg, then in Munich, the piano went with Wagner to Triebschen, where Cosima first came to Wagner. How long before the romance had been actually going on was never known.

Mrs. Campbell and Cornwallis West

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After ten weeks' rest I went to Chicago and met Helen and Beo, and produced a little one-act play of Beo's, "The Ambassador's Wife." It was quite a success in its way, and it gave them both great encouragement.

I then received a cable from England asking me to play in "Lady Patricia." I arrived there the day before rehearsal, leaving Beo and Helen in Chicago.

George, who had returned to England from Mexico some months before, met me. He had arranged a special train that I might smuggle "Georgina," the little griffon he had given me when "Pinkie" died. But a detective was on my track and "Georgina" was put in quarantine.

In September I again went to New York, glad to be out of England. I played "La Vierge Folle," translated from the French of Henri Battaille by Rudolf Besier.

At Mr. Frohman's request the play had been much altered; the religious argument being entirely eradicated, thereby making it simply a story of a woman "chasing" a husband, who was enjoying life away from her with a "foolish virgin."

At the end of the play the girl overhears the wife's appeal to the husband and shoots herself.

In the French it is a fine play, the religious argument against the willful destruction of the virgin soul and the wife's belief in her duty to be of spiritual help to her husband give dignity and some excuse to the ugliness of the story.

The Americans disliked the play intensely.

I was back in England again within four months. "Belladonna" was sent to me from the St. James's Theater to read. I did not care for the play, or the part, and refused it.

About this time Helen wrote to me from America, begging me to let her and Beo return to Kensington Square. I was only too delighted to send for them, for I was very lonely there.

In the meantime the talk of George's divorce and bankruptcy was in the air. The world, knowing our love for one another, still gossiped; I was "living at the mercy of a malevolent world."

I remember telling Lord Ribblesdale how it troubled me; he answered, "My dear, people think and talk according to their own natures, and how they would act under similar temptations and circumstances."

Again George Alexander sent me "Belladonna." This time I accepted the part. On December 9th, 1911, "Belladonna" was produced at the St. James's Theater.

The smart world was interested, and the play made a small fortune.

One night during this play I was driving to the St. James's; a boy on a bicycle coming from the main road from Rutland Gate ran into my taxi. My taxi swerved to get out of the way and smashed into another taxi.

My head went through the window opposite and I saw stars. My hatpin broke in two. I did not let go of my little dog and she was not hurt. Some one picked up the boy and took him to St. George's Hospital. I hailed another taxi and drove on to the theater.

My faithful Julia said, "What is the matter, Madam, you look so funny?" I replied, "I have been bumped about in a taxi," but she had gone out of the room. In a few moments George Alexander came in in a dressing gown. I told him I was all right and I was going to play. He told me to look in the glass. I looked, and the top of my head resembled Ally Sloper's!

Sir George sent for a doctor, and he ordered me home at once and ice bags on my head all night. The skin was not broken, the hemorrhage was internal. Julia and Miss Morris, my secretary and companion, stood by my bed all night, begging me not to talk, but I was quite incapable of stopping.

Little tiny threads of cotton seemed to be pulling my head up into the air!

Next day and for some days my face was black and blue and my eyes were imperceptible.

Within a fortnight I went with dear friends, Sir Edward and Lady Strachey, by boat and motor to Aix. Dr. Rendal said hot baths would soothe my stiff body and do me good. On the contrary they made me very ill.

A cable came from America offering me a fine tour with a one act play of Sir James Barrie's. I hurried home. That night my son had come up from the country to see me. Beo and Helen had been living in the country; he was busy on his play, "The Dust of Egypt," which Gerald du Maurier produced later at Wyndham's Theater with much success. Beo looked into my face and said, "Mother, you are ill; I'm going to sleep here." I went to bed—he sent for his wife. How glad I was to have Helen and Beo with me! Thirty-three Kensington Square without the children was an empty nest.

I was in bed for over six months in one position. It was nearly nine months before I could walk. People said I was "blind," "paralyzed by the accident," and the papers said I was "sinking fast." Nine doctors came. I used to hear them talking in the room below me, but my mind possessed one feeling only, that I need not trouble about anything any more, even to lift my eyelids or move my hand.

I had no sense of time, only a glorious sense of peace. One doctor said the accident had let free some poisonous germ, others that it was a severe nerve breakdown; there were whispers of appendicitis, then the brain; candles used to be held in front of me and my eyelids lifted up. Sometimes I was seized with an agonizing pain, but I was never quite sure where it was. Nurses came and went. My body was the nearest thing to death that life can hold. My living mind grasped the utter futility and weariness of all this business of life, and I dwelt upon the ineffable quiet of death. Only when my son or his wife was in the room or a friend with a frightened face was I able to pull myself together and say something funny.

Thirty-three Kensington Square was a white panelled house within, clean and clear, austere almost. My children had grown up there and now month upon month I lay longing for the word of release.

Outside they placed straw halfway round the square to drown the noise of the carriages that brought many friends and distinguished people who were anxious or wanted to help me. Some sat by my bed and told me stories to amuse me. From my loneliness I looked upon them with despair. How could these things matter, how could people be amused by them?

One day my devoted and beautiful daughter-in-law put her head round the screen of my bed and whispered as though she could hardly believe the good news: "You are going to live!" I had not seen her for many hours, and it seemed to me that I had heard unceasing murmurings in the room beneath me.

To her it seemed such happy news—it only made me cry. I should have to stand up again, face that looking glass, think what hat I should put on, worry about George's affairs and his love for me and mine for him, go to the theater every night and act, and I should have to pick up the senseless things of life and go on with my "career"—why? what for?—and there would be all the bills for this illness, my children gone from my care, the man I loved not free.

Whatever the illness may have been, a violent nerve breakdown was the greater part of it.

The old morbidity that had been my lifelong enemy had gotten hold of me, and just to slip into my bed and out of the world seemed a splendid escape. I closed my eyes and made no fight of any kind, little coward that I was.

Friends were full of loving concern and sympathy. Dear Lady Savile sent me flowers every day, but the day came when there were no flowers and no one answered me when I mentioned her name. She was dead.

George came to see me one day. I had not seen him for a long time; he seemed profoundly moved and unhappy. His "Live, Stella; live and help me" touched me to the roots of my being and made me give credence to his words, and the thought that I could help him remained with me.

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One human being through the intelligent grasp of his genius understood the nerve rack of my illness. Himself living in a dream world, he made a dream world for me, an ante-room between life and death, and only those who can understand this can understand the lovely friendship Bernard Shaw gave to me by my sick bed.

He reveled in the mischievous fun and in the smiles he brought to my face. He did not care a snap of the fingers at the moment what anybody else might say or think. He knew well enough that my heart had been given elsewhere, though we never spoke of it; he meant perhaps to get it back for me if he could.

EQUIPPED with nothing but their skill and endurance, a few ponies, a gun or two and provisions enough to last them for the day, the early mountaineers of the West set out to make their way through a vast wilderness that held all the terrors of the unknown. It is interesting to recall, among other things pertaining to those self-reliant men, the foods in use by the Cheyenne Indians, with whom the plainsmen often came in contact.

The Cheyennes were a proud and brave people. Meat was their principal food, although berries of different kinds were collected in season, as well as various roots. The kettle was on the tripod night and day.

Most tribes of plains Indians dried their meat by cutting it into thin flakes and spreading it on racks and poles in the sun. Pemmican was manufactured in the following manner:

The choicest cuts of meat were selected and cut into flakes and dried. Then all the marrow was collected and the best of the tallow, and both dissolved together over a slow fire. Many tribes used berries in their pemmican. Mountaineers also did, unless they had sugar.

The meat was then pulverized to the consistency of mincemeat, the squaws generally doing this on a flat rock, using a pestle. A layer of meat was spread, about two inches thick, the squaws using a wooden dipper, a buffalo horn or a claw for this work. On this meat was spread a certain amount of the melted marrow and tallow, the proportion depending upon the taste. This same process was repeated until the desired amount was secured. One pound of pemmican was equal in nourishment to five pounds of fresh meat.

Another important article of food, the equal of which was not to be had except from the buffalo, was "depuyer" *(dépouilee)*. It was a fat substance that lay along the backbone next to the hide, running from the shoulder blade to the last rib, and about as thick as one's finger or even hand. It would weigh from five to eleven pounds, according to the size or condition of the animal. It would keep indefinitely, and was used as a substitute for bread, but was superior to any bread that was ever eaten.

When going on the warpath the Indians would take some dried meat and some "depuyer" to live on, and nothing else, even if they were to be gone for several months.

Would You Take a Look at This!

Drawn by G. E. Studdy. (Copyright, 1922, by arrangement with London Sketch.)

"THERE was a poet once, or some other kind of a funny fellow, who said he'd like to have the chance to see himself as others saw him. I'd like to meet that man. I would make a fairly good meal off of him. Because here I am seeing myself as my master sees me. And I never had such a pain in my life—that is, not since I ate too many crabapples. My master had me sit on a stool, all perked up and stiff like a monument, while he painted this thing.

"It's a good thing he got out of the room before I got a look at it. I'll leave it to you if it looks anything like me. Master says it's a futurist thing. But if I'm going to look like that in the future I wish I'd kicked the bucket yesterday.

But I guess us dogs are unappreciated, just like I've heard my mistress say she's unappreciated sometimes. This picture makes me look fierce, and the trouble is with me I never can be fierce enough. All the boys and girls in the neighborhood impose on me, and when I get mad at them they just laugh. I will leave it to you if there's anything about me to laugh at. Maybe I'm not as handsome as some dogs, but, anyway, I don't look like this thing here.

"As soon as I get up enough nerve to take another look at it I'm going to tear it up. I will tell you next Sunday what my master does to me when he finds this awful picture of me all chewed up."